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ABSTRACT

Thirty-four representatives of the Department for Education and Employment and other national organizations in the United Kingdom, researchers and educators in the fields of career education and guidance, and guidance practitioners from careers service companies and higher education institutions explored ways of developing a research culture in career education and guidance. The discussions focused on the following six themes: (1) understanding what research involves; (2) establishing a research culture; (3) promoting theory and research in initial and post-experience training; (4) providing incentives for careers service companies and others involved in career education and guidance to engage in research; (5) building networks in the career education and guidance sector to connect research with practice; and (6) improving dissemination of research results. Seventeen recommendations for providing rewards and resources to encourage research in career education and guidance were identified. Among the recommendations were the following: (1) central government departments should amend their planning guidance for career service companies so that research time is written into corporate and business plans; (2) careers service companies should make extent of critical enquiry and interest part of staff development reviews; (3) line managers should encourage ideas for research from practitioners; and (4) individuals' research should be publicly recognized. (MN)

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Developing a Research Culture in Career Education and Guidance

Report on a NICEC/CRAC invitational policy consultation held on 30 September to 1 October 1998 at Madingley Hall, Cambridge

sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment

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The world of work is changing ever more rapidly. This poses enormous challenges to the career education and guidance community in terms of how to develop and respond to a swiftly changing set of client needs. Innovation in service delivery will be the hallmark of successful careers services and other career education and guidance providers in the future. Developing a research culture must be an integral part of this response.

The aim of the consultation was to identify ways in which a stronger research culture might be developed and supported in all sectors of career education and guidance provision. In particular, the consultation explored the current structures through which theory and research are communicated to practitioners, and through which practitioners can be involved in the development of theory and research. It also examined and made recommendations about how these structures might be enhanced and extended.

The 34 participants included representatives from DfEE, individuals who have conducted research on aspects of career education and guidance, lecturers with responsibilities for DipCG courses in higher education, career education and guidance practitioners from careers service companies and from higher education institutions, and representatives from relevant national organisations. The consultation was chaired by Tony Watts, Director of NICEC.

This report records the main themes of the discussions and the recommendations made. It is written by Charles Jackson, NICEC Fellow. It does not necessarily represent the views of the consultation sponsors, or of any particular individual at the event.

NICEC

The National Institute for Careers Education and Counselling is a network organisation sponsored by CRAC. It conducts applied research and development work related to guidance in educational institutions and in work and community settings. Its aim is to develop theory, inform policy and enhance practice through staff development, organisation development, curriculum development, consultancy and research.

CRAC

The Careers Research and Advisory Centre is a registered educational charity and independent development agency founded in 1964. Its education and training programmes, publications and sponsored projects provide links between the worlds of education and employment.

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UNDERSTANDING WHAT RESEARCH INVOLVES

Research in career education and guidance (CEG) fulfils a number of functions. These include:

- informing policy (*eg* by describing the process of CEG and measuring its effects);
- developing tools for use in CEG (*eg* classification schemes for occupational data or computer-assisted career guidance systems);
- generating theoretical and conceptual inputs (*eg* to help practitioners understand the processes in which they are attempting to intervene).

This research can be carried out by specialist researchers or by CEG practitioners. It necessarily covers a wide range of related activities including evaluation, reflection on practice, projects both large and small, experiments, professional development, study for higher degrees, theoretical work, and the development of new forms of practice. As a subject area, CEG draws on research from a number of academic disciplines (education, psychology, sociology, *etc.*) and suffers to some extent because it lacks a single academic and professional institutional base. Professional CEG organisations are often closely related to particular education sectors, and CEG is not a separate subject area for higher education funding purposes. As a consequence, research in CEG can sometimes appear fragmented or to be dominated by the policy concerns of central government.

This has had a variety of consequences for the CEG profession. It has meant that practitioners often feel excluded from the practice of research, and perceive some research as undermining rather than supporting their professional practice. This is dysfunctional for the profession, particularly at a time when the demands on it are growing. Developing a research culture offers potentially enormous benefits to the CEG community and implies a much greater involvement of practitioners in the research process. It also heralds the possibility of transforming the nature of the research process itself, to one that includes, rather than excludes, its key stakeholders.

ESTABLISING A RESEARCH CULTURE

Before an organisation can have a research culture, it will need to have a learning culture. Characteristics of a learning culture include:

- willingness to learn and to change;
- receptivity to new ideas;
- proactive attitude towards training;
- reflective, self-critical practitioners;
- spirit of enquiry;
- critical use of a range of information sources;
- willingness to share ideas;
- willingness to acknowledge the importance of research;
- awareness of some of the critical skills required for research.

It was felt that, in some CEG settings, significant culture change would be required before such a culture was in place. Successful innovation will almost certainly require CEG providers to have strategic planning processes which embrace the findings of external and internal research and evaluation. They will also need to communicate openly with their staff and be flexible in their attitudes towards the development of their people as well as their services.

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THEORY AND RESEARCH IN TRAINING

Encouraging a research culture has implications for the training of CEG practitioners at both initial and post-experience levels. There is a need for theory and research to be given more emphasis in initial training, and a particular concern that NVQ-based training programmes may focus too exclusively on skill development and downplay theory and research.

Imaginative initiatives, however, have been carried out by particular higher education institutions. For example, one higher education institution has run a 'theory week' to promote awareness of theory and its implications for practice. The potential importance of networks (see later) at a local, regional and national level as one way of delivering in-service training must also be recognised.

There is a need to encourage more practitioners to undertake post-experience courses not only in guidance (*eg* MA in Guidance Studies) but also in related subjects (*eg* Labour Market Studies). This would improve the links between practitioners, their employers and higher education institutions, and serve to extend and broaden the links within the wider CEG community.

Recommendation 1: The importance of theory and research in initial training should be reinforced.

Recommendation 2: Specific reference should be made to theory and research in the professional development section of the *Requirements and Guidance for Careers Service Providers* and other relevant documents issued by DfEE.

Recommendation 3: Central Government Departments*/employers should fund a small number of bursaries for higher-level in-service training.

PROVIDING INCENTIVES

A key issue is how to provide incentives for careers service companies and other organisations involved in CEG to engage in research. Incentives need to be provided at all levels, from an organisational level through to the individual level. The intention should be to develop internal/individual expertise and not for companies/organisations to become extensive commissioners of external research. However, they may want to work with external researchers who can provide training and consultancy to support and develop the companies/organisations' research capability. It is important that such activity is not seen as an additional administrative burden but rather as a framework for recognising and rewarding this type of research activity. The box on the next page sets out a linked series of recommendations designed to encourage the development of a research culture.

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* The consultation was clear that it wished to address the issue of developing a research culture on a UK-wide basis, as the issue is a common one in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in spite of a variety of statutory frameworks and traditions. For that reason we have used 'Central Government Departments' to indicate recommendations addressed to DfEE, the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, the Training and Employment Agency and Department of Education for Northern Ireland, and the Welsh Office Education and Industry Departments.

Recommendations for providing rewards and resources to encourage research in career education and guidance

4 For central government

4.1 Central Government Departments should amend their planning guidance for business planning in career service companies, so that research time is written into corporate and business plans.

4.2 Central Government Departments should provide extra finance for research activity (equivalent to one member of staff in an average-sized company).

4.3 Central Government Departments should provide funds from which schools and colleges might bid to provide staffing cover to allow joint research activities with careers service companies.

4.4 LECs/TECs should provide funding from which employers/training providers/Education Business Partnerships might apply to cover staffing costs for engaging in research with careers service companies.

4.5 A central register of research should be maintained as a condition of funding for schools, colleges and employers. Careers service companies should submit on an annual basis abstracts of research and intended research briefs.

4.6 Research quality awards should be created in order to encourage research activity and recognise particular projects.

5 For careers service companies

5.1 Careers service companies should include extent of critical enquiry and interest as part of staff development reviews.

5.2 Careers service companies should include in their staff development plans provision for training and support of staff involved in research.

5.3 A senior manager should be nominated within each careers service company to have responsibility for conducting, interpreting and disseminating current research.

5.4 A Board member should be nominated to link with the nominated senior manager in order to integrate relevant research into Board discussions.

5.5 Careers service companies should incorporate reports on current research into their staff training.

6 For line managers of CEG practitioners

6.1 Line managers should have a pivotal role in encouraging ideas for research from practitioners and in monitoring the use of allocated research time.

7 For individual practitioners

7.1 Encouragement should be provided for as many individuals as possible working in CEG (*ie* from Chief Executive to administrative staff within careers service companies, plus different grades of staff in training providers, schools, colleges, universities and employers) to be involved in research on a rolling-programme basis.

7.2 Individuals' research work should be publicly recognised, with opportunities to present it to relevant audiences for discussion and to show how lessons can be applied.

7.3 An introductory input on 'What is research?' should be provided in initial training of CEG practitioners to demystify the term and help practitioners to think about research as critical enquiry into practice.

7.4 A booklet should be produced on 'Research Techniques for Career Education and Guidance Practitioners'. This should include advice about putting together a research bid and should list organisations that fund research.

7.5 In-service training should be provided by experienced researchers/academics to demonstrate how to record evidence and write reports: this would facilitate accreditation and publication.

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BUILDING NETWORKS

The CEG sector needs to build on existing networks to connect practice with research. Networks need to be built at local, regional and national levels within the CEG community. At a local level, several events are currently taking place which include CEG organisations across all sectors working together: these are raising the profile of research linked to practice (and vice-versa). Building regional networks will help to 'seed' more local networks and, potentially, will feed into a culture of learning and research at local, regional and national levels, as well as benefiting the organisations that participate directly in these networks.

It is important to recognise that networks are being generated at a local and regional level to a considerable extent from the 'ground up', although it would be helpful to explore how such networks could also be encouraged from the 'top down'. Dissemination of the outputs from local and regional networks is particularly important and is discussed in more detail in the next section. At a regional level, initiatives should span all sectors and provide a vital connection between researchers, policy makers and practitioners. This would facilitate creative and innovative thinking that is grounded in theory and practice. Both local and regional networks should help practitioners engage in systematic reflection on practice and help to link up sectors and individuals/organisations within the CEG community with similar areas of interest.

Regional networks might be expected to have formal links with Regional Development Agencies and with higher education institutions, and to run seminars and other events. In particular, there is a need for experienced researchers to mentor/tutor practitioners who are carrying out action research. At the consultation, a number of the organisations that were present committed themselves to participate in an informal research and practice network.

There is a strong need for a more formal National Career Network, which is centrally funded to offer a forum to debate practice, policy and research from both the UK and overseas. Rather than setting up an organisation with a representative or committee structure, it might be better to appoint a contractor to run such a network. The VET Forum provides a possible model. The network would be expected to organise national conferences and produce newsletters. It should be linked to the National Grid for Learning.

Recommendation 8: Central Government Departments should invite tenders from interested parties for bids to run and manage a National Career Network to provide a forum that will develop linkages between individuals and organisations engaged in CEG practice, policy and research both within and beyond the CEG community.

A primary reason for establishing networks is to strengthen the CEG community. But it is important to recognise that CEG also needs to have strong links with other professional groups working in closely related fields (social work, youth work, probation, etc.). This means that networks should encourage links and share expertise with these other groups - for example, through joint events, visiting speakers, and so on.

DISSEMINATING RESEARCH

Improvements are needed in the way research is communicated within the CEG community. Academics working in related disciplines (*eg* sociology, education) need to be persuaded to write about the implications of their research for CEG practice. However, successful dissemination, whether through databases, conferences or journals, also requires specialist expertise of various kinds. It is particularly important that the CEG community gets access to these specialist skills if it is to implement a successful strategy for disseminating research more widely.

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A major need is for a research database which should include abstracts/digests of a wide range of research publications (articles, books, dissertations, evaluations, *etc.*). It might also include details of work/projects in progress. New technology (*eg* the Internet) makes this much easier

to deliver than previously. It is important that any new database is linked to existing databases and other networks. The database should be designed to take into account the needs of a wide range of potential users.

Recommendation 9: Discussions should take place with Central Government Departments and other organisations which support research about providing funding for the development of a research database.

A research community needs to meet as well as to share information. Conferences are one means of doing this. They provide opportunities for informal networking as well as the dissemination of research findings. It is particularly important that any new event is seen as spanning all sectors of the CEG community and therefore that it is organised by organisations that are both national and cross-sectoral.

Recommendation 10: NICEC in association with the National Advisory Council for Careers and Educational Guidance should organise a biennial 'Research and Practice in Career Education and Guidance' conference, starting in 2000.

While CEG has undoubtedly benefited from the large amount of contract research that has been carried out in recent years, more could be done both to disseminate the outcomes of this research and, at an earlier stage, to involve others (researchers and practitioners) in discussions during the course of the research. The proposed local, regional and national networks provide one possible forum for this type of activity.

Recommendation 11: Commissioners of contract research should designate funding for dissemination and should mandate dissemination, including participation in local, regional and national networks to discuss research in progress, as an integral part of the research process and as a way of ensuring that the wider CEG community is better informed about research outcomes and processes.

There are a number of journals that are read by CEG practitioners, but most do not present research findings and/or are targeted at a single sector, while those that do present research findings (*eg* the *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*) are perceived to be written mainly for an academic audience. There is a gap in the market for a journal that disseminates relevant research and theory to the wider CEG community. While some publications, such as the ICG Occasional Papers and the NICEC *Bulletin*, provide possible models for this new journal, at present these publications are not addressed to a wide audience. One difficulty that a new journal would face is that many academics are under pressure to publish in peer-reviewed journals: to attract papers from academics the journal would need to be peer-reviewed, but preferably using criteria of practical application instead of, or in addition to, more conventional academic criteria (the *Australian Journal of Career Development* provides a useful model). Publishing the journal in an electronic format might be considered as a possibility and might have advantages in terms of cost and speed of publication, even though it might limit access and readership.

Recommendation 12: Professional bodies, national organisations and networks, and commercial publishers should explore the feasibility of a cross-sectoral CEG journal to include coverage of research and theory.

CONCLUSION

If CEG practitioners want to be seen as professionals, reflective practice and, by direct implication, developing a research culture are essential. However, the CEG community must also beware of exclusivity and recognise that CEG is also carried out extensively by other professionals, such as HR practitioners, as part of their work. Building links to these professions, as well as the wider research community, will be important if CEG is to maximise the benefits to its intended audience.

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